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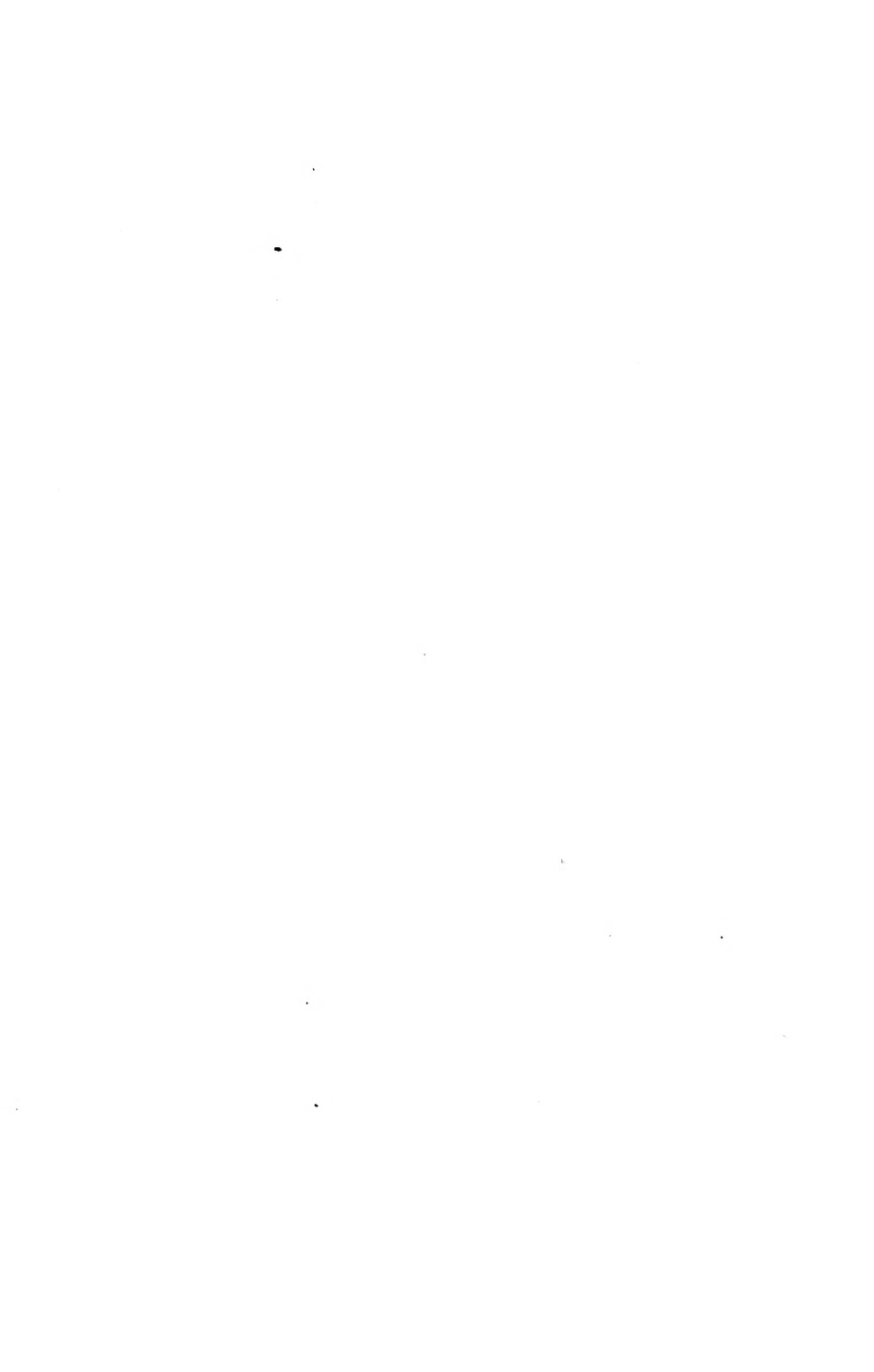
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.







The Duty of the Citizen in these Times :

A S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, ALBANY,

SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 21, 1861,

BY THE REV. SYLVANUS REED,

RECTOR OF THE CHURCH.



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S E R M O N .

“ Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.”—1 ST. PETER, ii, 13.

The injunctions upon the civil duties of Christian citizens, which occur in the Epistle appointed for this Sunday,* will have struck your minds as very seasonable. The Apostle addressing himself to the scattered people of God, in regard, of course, mainly to the great truths of the Gospel, and the great requirements of faith and obedience, takes occasion also, to speak to them of the necessity and the duty of so conducting themselves among the unbelievers who surrounded them, as to give no cause of offence. He cautions them not to misapprehend the character of that religious system which they had embraced, nor to suppose that it did not design to recognize, and to allow, and to sanction those principles of order, and those con-

* The Third Sunday after Easter.

sequent duties which are plainly fundamental to the very existence of civil society and of human government. Christians were, indeed, in that age peculiarly called out of, and separated from the world about them : and within the church they were in a peculiar manner associated together in close relations, and were constituted a new society, a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom which was not of this world, and which had by itself no relations to the political or social systems under which they were living. In this situation they might perhaps have imagined that they were even detached from the interests of the state, and from the obligation of the duties which devolved upon subjects and citizens of the state, under the laws and government of which they lived. The Apostle therefore would seem to design to teach them, that they were not to regard themselves as exonerated from the obligations which rested upon others, toward that temporal government of which they were subjects, and to warn them against everything of a factions and insubordinate character ; and to admonish them emphatically to be obedient to those who in the Providence of God were set to rule over them ; and so to be conformed to that civil condition of things in which they were living, by the ready discharge of the duties of citizens and subjects. The Apostle did not write his Epistle for the purpose of instructing the followers of Christ in regard to their political rights, or their civil

duties; but he finds occasion to recognize, and to express the authority of the great social and political obligations of men, obligations inherent in the nature of society, and sanctioned by that *Law* which emanated originally from the very Throne of God, and proceeded from His word. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake."

Without going beyond the text, two things we shall have here to remark: 1st. The recognition of an inherent and general obligation on the part of the members of a civil community, to submission and obedience. 2d. The holy Apostle adds the express sanction of Divine authority to that obligation, and enforces the duty of subordination and loyalty and obedience, by that name which is above every name. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake."

But this instruction of St. Peter is far from standing alone on the sacred page. The example and the precept of our blessed Saviour, on the occasion of the question about the tribute money, teach His followers the duty of obedience. "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's." Consider also the emphatic injunction which St. Paul addressed to the Church of Rome, at that time exposed to the tyranny of Nero: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of

God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”* The principle is broadly laid down, of a Divine right and authority in the supreme ruler of the state, which attaches also to those whom he sends to execute his commands. And the duty is as broadly and strongly prescribed of submission and obedience. “*To honor and obey the civil authority,*” is exhibited as a primary religious obligation resting upon all men, and required by the Law of God.

The *form* of the government under which the Christian citizen lives, does not affect the great principle laid down in the Word of God, nor the duty which that word enjoins. It is the same in a monarchy and in a republic. Wherever there is the rule of Law, the Ruler may be called by whatever title men choose: the modes in which government may be administered may vary widely; but the relations of the people, as subjects or citizens, are essentially unaffected, and the duties which they owe to the Ordinance of Government are those which are thus described; and the Christian citizen is required by the authority of religion to discharge those duties in the spirit of loyalty, as reverencing Him in whose august name the sword is borne.

I am far from saying that this principle is an unlimited one; or that these duties never can have

* Rom. xiii. 1, 2.

their proper exception. The history of our mother country would afford several instances of such limitations and exceptions, as probably none could refuse to admit. The very origin of our *own* government, which was established upon the basis of a successful Revolution, is an example of the truth, *that subjects have rights as well as duties, and that rulers have duties as well as powers.* No one perhaps can satisfactorily solve the problem, or explain the paradox, and say precisely where the duty of obedience ends, and where the right of resistance to oppression, to the exaggeration of the powers of rule, begins. In the case of our own Revolution it was, as is clear to my mind, no seditious and unprincipled rebellion; but a struggle for conceded and constitutional rights, violently wrested from the people of a great land. But the principle of the text is unsubverted, and the duty which it enjoins is incumbent on every citizen.

It is not my purpose, however, to discuss the principles involved in this subject, but rather to invoke the authority of the precepts of God's word in support of the great duty of loyalty to the government and the law, which stand invested with sacred sanctions, and requiring of every Christian citizen a faithful submission and obedience. *Loyalty* to the Country, the Constitution, and the Union, as represented impersonally to our minds; whoever may administer the government; this is the principle, and the feeling which impels us to duty, as

truly and as imperatively as tho' the object of our allegiance sat throned, crowned, and sceptred, to receive the tokens of our reverence, and our service. It is a sad and evil day, which, long threatening, has settled down upon us at last in horrible discord and intestine strife. After half a century of peace, the trumpet of war sounds over our land, an internal and sectional war, between the citizens of this hitherto united and happy country. For the first time in the whole history of this great Republic the bonds of unity and concord are broken among us, and the people of one half are arrayed in arms against the people of the other half. The same men, and the children of the same men, who together confronted the foreign foe, each ready to sacrifice life for the other, and both ready to die for the whole country, now face each other with the drawn sword, and all the fearful instruments of battle. From the North to South, and from East to West, the country is convulsed with that direst form of evil, CIVIL WAR; a war not of races, nor of creeds, but of brothers, and fellow citizens, and friends. It is an amazing and a terrific spectacle which we present to the eye of Heaven, and to the civilized world. The catastrophe which we have been for months hoping and praying to have in some way averted, has come, the cloud long and darkly rolling up from the gloomy horizon, has burst at length above our heads. Misguided and presumptuous men, the people of the entire South,

dragging with them perhaps half the States of our glorious and prosperous Union, have risen up in armed rebellion against the National Rulers, have claimed to be absolved from the authority of the Federal Executive, and are at this moment pressing forward furiously in all the array of war, to the overthrow and destruction of our general Government. Already they have presumed to assault a fortress guarded by the troops, and protected by the flag of the United States, and have compelled its brave commander, by an overwhelming force, to evacuate it. Already the power of this insurrection has reached the most imposing magnitude, and the supremacy of rebellion, or of law, must perhaps be put to the issue of battle. Already the whole country is turned into a camp, and the one absorbing topic in every quarter is the preparation which is being made for the dreadful struggle, the arming and the passage of troops, the progress of the strife, the probable issues of the contest, the danger or safety of the Capitol. Alas, my country! It is the darkest hour of its history, the saddest period it has ever seen, not only for the prospect of the terrors of war and carnage; not only for the bloody battle field, and the tears of widows and orphans; not for cities sacked and burnt, and smiling fields ravished and desolate; not for those things common to all war, and which our fathers and our grandfathers have seen in their time, but for what they were not compelled to see,

this horrid rupture of the bonds which have united us, this deadly contest between fellow citizens of the same once happy country, this fratricidal war raging like wildfire on our common soil! Great God, what a visitation is this which has come upon us! Why hast Thou sent a spirit of division among the tribes of Israel! Why is Thy wrath so hot against the sheep of Thy pasture!

Nevertheless, clear as the sun in the unclouded noonday, is the righteousness of our cause, and the duty of rallying one and all, with heart and with hand, to the support of the Government, to the protection of our Flag, to the maintenance of that principle of order and civil authority which is fundamental to our very existence as a community, and which is now assailed and imperiled by this audacious rebellion. That government represents to the citizen the majesty of Heaven, and the authority of sacred LAW, the very palladium of every natural and political right which we possess; and no hand must be raised against it with impunity. That flag symbolizes the Country, the Union, and the Constitution, as the objects of our reverence and our affection; and it must be kept floating freely over our whole land. To defend the government and to uphold that flag, is the imperative duty of every Christian citizen of the Republic, under the requirement of the highest obligations. The duty of the Patriot, the impulses of that love of country which is deep and strong in every true

heart, receive a higher sanction and a more solemn enforcement from the Word of God. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." Terrible as is the event of war, and as are the effects of *all* war, and aggravated as is the character of this species of war which has been forced upon us, there is but one way open to us as citizens, as men, as Christians. The call of duty is stern and fearful, but it is clear and authoritative, and we must respond to it; we have responded to it, promptly and with determination. If we claim the protection of the laws, if we make our home in this land, if we enjoy the benefits of the institutions under which we live, then, whether this be our native soil or not, our duty is to be prepared to venture everything in its service at its need. Complicated as the disastrous subject, which has been the main cause of this strife, may be, it is now a simple and distinct question, or rather no question, but a plain dictate of the way in which every citizen must act, if he would not be recreant to the obligations which lie upon him, whatever it may cost him. This is a crisis in the affairs of the country which calls for the services of men ready to brave death in her cause, to protect the government, to maintain the supremacy of lawful rule, to repel the treasonable assault of the foes, whoever they may be, who dare to violate the authority of the Union, and to attack our flag. The ordinary duty of quietness and order is now resolved into

that of active, determined defence of the government, assailed by violent and wicked hands; for now, in the day of peril and of need, allegiance and loyalty, submission and obedience to the supreme authority, patriotism, and even prudence and interest, concur, to bid us unsheath the sword, and to wield it manfully.

And the appeal which the country has made to the duty of her children, is answered far and near by thousands and tens of thousands who are gathering for her service. It is as if that proclamation which occurs so remarkably in the first lesson this morning had been sounded from hill to vale, thro' our northern borders. "Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, I am strong."* The love of country burns with ardor in the bosoms of our citizens, and the principles of duty, which impel men to array themselves for the protection of the civil authority, are always to be relied upon in any such emergency. Since force must be used to repel force, since we must try the issue of battle in order to the maintenance of rule, in the hands of those whom God has invested therewith, it is a source of pride to see the spirit and the courage with which thousands of the young men, the flower

* Joel iii, 9, 10.

of the country, have offered themselves for the military service which they are needed for. There should be no want of soldiers in a time like this, when our flag is imperiled, when insurrection is raising its wild crest, and the very citadel of the Union is threatened; and there will be no lack of soldiers as indomitable in courage as their cause is just, and their duty clear, and sanctioned by the Word of God. No nobler use can be made of life than to give it in the discharge of duty for the service of our country, to strengthen the arm of our rulers in the time of danger, and thus to defend and protect the dearest of all earthly interests. What memorable examples of patriotic devotion are inscribed on the most resplendent pages of HISTORY, making our hearts leap as we read the record? What instances of that heroic spirit have the annals of our own national struggles made familiar to our minds? Now is our time to show that those lessons of duty and courage have not been given us in vain, and to emulate the men of the Revolution. Onward, ye brave youth and veterans, and prove that you respond to that saying of old, “*Dulce et decorum est*,” &c.: It is sweet and glorious to die for our country!

Yet, while I would thus exhibit the path of duty at this hour, and thus plead the cause of patriotism, and incite all who can aid in the defence of the government to give themselves promptly for its

service and in every way to aid it, I must for myself protest against any supposition that I would lift my voice to appeal to mere sectional feelings, or to support a war of partisan objects. I cry shame on those men, who by the press, or the pulpit, would pervert this fearful catastrophe, this sad strife, to advance the ends of their wretched fanaticism, the men who *desire* to see the Union destroyed and the country divided, irreconcilably, and who rejoice in this conflict, for such reasons. We fight for the Union and the Constitution, and the whole country and its people. That is the only cause that can rally all, with united front, and with one heart, to the struggle.

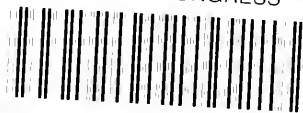
And in this hour, there are many whose hearts must be strong in the sense of duty, besides those who march beneath the flag of the Union, to battle, to all the hardships and all the perils of war. There are parents, and wives, and sisters, and daughters, who must part with those they love, and send them forth for the service of their God and their country, in the hot haste of the moment, and surrender them to the risks which they may encounter. Heaven help them in this their time of need. While the soldier, in the bustle of the camp, in the furious excitement of the strife, in the incessant occupation of the work which he is performing, can perhaps forget the grief of parting; those who stay at home are left to the endurance of anxieties and appre-

hensions, which may have but too sorrowful a fulfillment. LET THE HONORS OF PATRIOTISM BE SHARED BETWEEN THEM, and may their prayers be heard, and answered, by Him who is mighty to save! And let them remember, that the safety of those they love would be dearly purchased at the expense of honor, and of manly courage and of duty.

But what a fearful judgment is this which has at last come upon us! We want language to express the extent and the character of this unparalleled calamity, the horrible nature of this intestine strife which threatens to sweep its bloody wave over our fair land. Must this strife go on? Must the sword devour forever? While we send our armies forth to fight for the right, and to uphold those whom God has placed in the seats of power, as it is our duty, let us humble ourselves before God, and implore him speedily to withdraw from us this scourge, and in the abundance of His goodness to spare us, and give peace in our time. We wait for Thy loving kindness, O Lord, in the midst of Thy Temple!



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